

FOUTS SPRINGS YOUTH FACILITIES

2006-2007 Solano County Grand Jury

Reason for Investigation

California Penal Code §919 Subsection (b) provides: “The Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county.”

California Penal Code §925a authorizes a grand jury to examine the books and records of any joint powers agency located in the county. Further a grand jury may investigate and report on the operations, accounts and records of the officers, departments, functions and the method or system of performing the duties of the joint powers agency and to make any recommendations it may deem proper and fit.

Pursuant to the statutes, the Grand Jury inspected Fouts Springs Youth Facility located in Colusa County.

Grand Jury Actions

- Met with Fouts Springs Directors and the camp’s staff
- Toured and inspected classes
- Attended board meeting
- Interacted with wards
- Reviewed budget report and general statistics
- Met briefly with Facility Manager and assistant
- Conducted a conference call/exit interview

Background/Summary

Fouts Springs (Fouts) was established in Colusa County in 1959. The land, a part of the Mendocino National Forest, is leased from the federal government. Fouts was established as an alternative to Juvenile Hall. Originally, three counties were involved. Yolo County built its own unit in the 1980s and left the consortium. Fouts is currently operated under a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) between Solano and Colusa Counties. Administrative authority rests with the Solano County Probation Department. All counties in California can participate, but presently, 12 counties send wards to Fouts.

Fouts’ capacity is 160 wards. At the Grand Jury’s October visit, there were 49 wards in residence, a 69 percent vacancy rate. Average daily population has declined over the last three years. One reason was the opening of juvenile facilities by other counties. Also, near the end of Fiscal Year 2001/02, Fouts was notified by the California Youth Authority that the agency would not be in a position to renew its agreement for the placement of parole violators.

Although Fouts can accommodate 160 wards, the Fiscal Year 2006/07 budget was developed based on 60-bed occupancy. Fouts Springs’ Board of Directors reviews rates, programs and staffing to ensure revenues would approximate expenses. Solano and Colusa Counties, as JPA partners, pay \$5400 monthly per ward which is 35 percent more than non-member counties. Non-JPA counties are charged only \$3500 per ward to encourage participation.

The Solano County Probation Department monitors enrollment levels and expenses. Other in-county programs are available, but offer less in educational activities and lack Fouts' geographic isolation.

Fouts became the Probation Department's administrative responsibility in May 2006. Fouts is "enterprise fund" driven, which means its objective is to be financially self-sufficient. The Solano County Board of Supervisors approved transfer of \$1.5 million dollars from its Probation Department budget to pay off Fouts' capital improvement debt.

A broad review process is used in the placement of youths at Fouts. All options are studied before a probation department recommends removal of a youth from his home for residential treatment at Fouts. Solano County Probation Department's disposition reports are reviewed by a judge before placement. Two felony convictions and high community risk can be part of such consideration. Ultimately, the final decision is made by a judge. Fouts is the last placement before youth authority incarceration.

Fouts' purpose is to instill responsibility and to return productive citizens to their community. Fouts' recidivism rate is 35 percent. Nielson High School, an on-site accredited high school, is overseen by Colusa County Office of Education and provides four hours of academic education daily. The graduation rate is 67 percent. Certified vocational instructors are available to provide training in welding, carpentry, electrical, and mechanical. Products made in the shops include bookcases and clocks that the wards can take home. Nothing produced is sold. Small engines are repaired. Bicycles are repaired and "flats fixed." At the time of our visit, a donated jeep was being restored. Equipment in the vocational shops appears antiquated.

The wards perform clean-up after activities in the nearby small towns of Stonyford and Davis Flats. They deliver ice and firewood. They also built, delivered and installed a drop box at the local library.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1 - Solano and Colusa Counties pay more per ward than other participants. Other counties receive a 35 percent subsidy per ward, which is \$1900.

Recommendation 1 - The Joint Powers Authority should establish ward rates that are equal for all counties.

Finding 2 - There is no consistent method of record keeping that tracks the success rate of a ward's return to the community.

Recommendation 2 – Participating counties should be required to track and report back to the Solano County Probation Department on released ward performance to evaluate the success of Fouts Springs programs.

Finding 3 - Fouts Springs ward capacity is 160. At the time of our inspection, there were 49 wards, which represent a 69 percent vacancy rate.

Recommendation 3 - The Fouts Springs governing board, in conjunction with the Solano County Probation Department, should develop an aggressive marketing campaign to bring Fouts Springs to its current maximum capacity. The Director of Fouts Springs should develop promotional material, including a video, featuring Fouts graduates, to promote Fouts to other counties.

Finding 4 - The sentencing of wards to Fouts Springs is determined by a judge after a probation department's report is presented.

Recommendation 4 - The probation department's recommendation to the judge should give a clear picture of the benefits in sentencing a ward to Fouts Springs.

Finding 5 - Vocational shop equipment appears antiquated.

Recommendation 5 - All vocational shop equipment should be brought up to current industry standards. This would give the wards a better employment opportunity upon their release.

Finding 6 - The Solano County tax payers bore \$1.5 million dollar debt expenditure for capital improvements, by Board of Supervisor's action, at Colusa County's Fouts Springs' location.

Recommendation 6 - Any future capital debt assumption should be evaluated in terms of what is best for Solano County taxpayers.

Comments

The Grand Jury suggests that wards voluntarily communicate their experiences at Fouts Springs to the probation officials in their home county.

Fouts Springs must increase its population to be economically viable in the long term. The current goal of a population of 60 wards is not utilizing the large amount of capital invested in Fouts Springs. If the population cannot be increased, thought should be given to closing Fouts Springs and transferring wards to in-county facilities.

The Grand Jury suggests modifying current practices to better track the success or failure results from Fouts Springs. These tracking mechanisms may help determine the feasibility of continuing the Fouts Springs program.

Affected Agencies

- Fouts Springs Board of Governors
- Fouts Springs Youth Facility Superintendent
- Solano County Board of Supervisors
- Solano County Department of Probation
- Solano County Juvenile Court

Courtesy Copies

Colusa County Board of Supervisors
Colusa County Department of Probation
Colusa County Juvenile Courts